

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1594

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 2574

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT VE

SUBJECT: DIEGO ARRIA TO TRY FOR THE PRESIDENCY

1. MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND TOURISM DIEGO ARRIA TOLD THE AMBASSADOR MARCH 16 THAT HE IS "95 PERCENT DECIDED" TO RUN FOR THE PRESIDENCY THIS YEAR, AND THAT HIS PLANS ARE TO QUIT THE CABINET IN APRIL, ORGANIZE HIS CAMPAIGN AND LAUNCH IT PUBLICLY IN JULY (JULY 1 IS THE DEADLINE FOR REGISTRY OF CANDIDATES). THE DUBIOUS "5 PERCNET" IN HIS DECISION MAKING IS CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ, WHO TALKED HIM OUT OF RUNNING EARLIER. CAP, ARRIA SAID, WILL TRY TO TALK HIM OUT OF IT AGAIN.

2. ARRIA EXPLAINED THAT HE HAS CONCLUDED THIS IS HIS ONLY CHANCE TO BUILD A POLITICIAL BASE FOR A POLITICAL FUTURE. ALTHOUGH THE AD HAS OFFERED TO PUT HIM UP AS SENATOR FROM CARACAS AND EVEN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, ARRIA SAID, IT WOULD ONLY MEAN WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO DO NOT LIKE HIM AND WHO WOULD NEVER LET HIM HAVE ANY POWER. EVEN THOUGH CAP INTENDS TO RUN AGAIN IN TEN YEARS, THERE IS NO PERCENTAGE IN SIMPLY WAITING FOR CAP. BEING OUT OF THE PUBLIC EYE FOR AS LONG AS FIVE YEARS, ARRIA SAID, IS POLITICAL SUICIDE. HE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT THE AD LEADER-SHIP DOES NOT LIKE HIM AND WOULD KEEP HIM POLITICALLY ISOLATED. HE CALLED BETENCOURT AN "ANGERY OLD MAN" WHO BITTERLY DISLIKES HIM (ARRIA).

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3. ARRIA SAID THAT HE HAS AN OUTSIDE CHANCE TO WIN THE PRESIDENCY, BUT WHAT HE IS REALLY COUNTING ON IS SPLITTING THE POWER THREE WAYS. THUS, HIS CANDIDACY MAY VERY WELL MEAN THAT NO ONE CANDIDATE IS LIKELY TO GET MUCH MORE THAN 40 PERCENT, AND THE CONGRESSIONAL LINE-UP COULD ALSO LEAVE NO PARTY WITH A MAJORITY. THUS, TWO OF THE

GHREE GROUPS WOULD HAVE TO GET TOGETHER TO FASHION A WORKING MAJORITY. SINCE THE AD AND COPEI WILL NOT DEAL WITH EACH OTHER, HE REASONS, HE COULD PROBABLY BECOME THE POWER BROKER. HE ALSO RECOGNIZES THE RISK THAT IF HIS SUPPORT IS SMALL HE MAY END UP BEING ODD MAN OUT. IF COPEI WINS HE MAY ALSO BE ACCUSED BY THE AD OF BEING THE REASON, OR VICE VERSA, AND THUS INCUR SERIOUS POLITICAL ENMITIES. NEVERTHELESS, ARRIA SAID, THIS IS A CHANCE HE HAS TO TAKE. IT IS NOW OR NEVER. ALSO, WITH A POLITICAL BASE OF HIS OWN HE WILL BE OF HELP TO CAP LATER AND CAN REJOIN HIM IN A FEW YEARS.

4. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED WHO ARRIA FIGURED HE WOULD HURT THE MOST WITH A THIRD CANDIDACY. HE SAID HE THOUGHT PROBABLY HE WOULD TAKE MORE VOTES AWAY FROM HERRERA THAN FROM PINERUA, BUT IF HIS CAMPAIGN CATCHES ON HE WILL HURT BOTH. HE SAID THAT POLLS SHOW THAT A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO VOTED FOR CAP WILL NOT VOTE FOR PINERUA, AND CAP CANNOT "TRANSFER" HIS SUPPORT TO THE AD CANDIDATE. MANY OF THESE WOULD VOTE FOR ARRIA.

5. ARRIA SAID THAT HE CAN RAISE ALL THE CAMPAIGN FUNDS NECESSARY. HE IS TRYING ALSO TO FASHION MEDIA SUPPORT BY AN ALLIANCE AMONG THE DEARMAS AND CAPRILES CHAINS AND LUIS NUNEZ (PUBLISHER OF EL UNIVERSAL). HE INTENDS TO CALL HIS "PARTY" CAUSA COMUN (COMMON CAUSE), AND TO CONFIDENTIAL

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PUT UP AS CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES CIVIC, BUSINESS AND TECHNICAL FIGURES TO AVOID THE "POLITICIAN" IMAGE. HE HAS ALREADY HIRED DAVID SAWYER AND INTENDS TO HIRE PAT CADDELL TO ADVISE HIM. (COMMENT: THIS WILL MAKE THE VENEZUELAN CAMPAIGN AN AREA FOR US ADVISORS: AD HAS HIRED NAPOLITAN AND WHITE, AND COPEI HAS HIRED DAVID GARTH WHO ALSO ADVISED RODRIGO CARRAZO IN HIS RECENT COSTA RICAN VICTORY.)
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